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# Character Strengths as a Pathway to Obtaining and Maintaining Employment for Job Seekers with Disabilities: A Model for Building Job Seeker Hope and Self-Efficacy

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## **Abstract**

Americans with disabilities experience low rates of employment and are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than their non-disabled peers. Job seekers with disabilities face a myriad of external barriers to employment: 1) lower education/skill attainment, 2) complex public benefit rules, 3) limited access to reliable transportation, 4) lack of work-related supports, and 5) persistent employer-bias. These challenges are compounded by internal barriers: 1) diminished self-efficacy and hope, 2) social role devaluation, and 3) extrinsic work motivations. Several theories within positive psychology offer new pathways to employment for people with disabilities. One such theory is character strengths. Character strengths offer a framework for understanding who we are at our core and how to leverage our strengths to improve outcomes in multiple areas of life. Research on character has led to the design of interventions to build hope and self-efficacy, and to foster goal achievement. This paper will review research on character strengths as a facilitator of employment for job seekers with disabilities and provide an outline for integrating character-based positive interventions into a national employment program for people with acquired physical disabilities.

## **Keywords**

Character strengths, hope, self-efficacy, disability, employment, job seeker

## **Disciplines**

Counseling Psychology | Other Psychology | Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Social Psychology | Work, Economy and Organizations

Character Strengths as a Pathway to Obtaining and Maintaining Employment  
for Job Seekers with Disabilities: A Model for Building Job Seeker Hope and Self-Efficacy

Elizabeth Jennings

University of Pennsylvania

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Advisor: Ryan M. Niemiec, Psy.D.

August 1, 2017

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Americans with disabilities experience low rates of employment and are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than their non-disabled peers. Job seekers with disabilities face a myriad of external barriers to employment: 1) lower education/skill attainment, 2) complex public benefit rules, 3) limited access to reliable transportation, 4) lack of work-related supports, and 5) persistent employer-bias. These challenges are compounded by internal barriers: 1) diminished self-efficacy and hope, 2) social role devaluation, and 3) extrinsic work motivations. Several theories within positive psychology offer new pathways to employment for people with disabilities. One such theory is character strengths. Character strengths offer a framework for understanding who we are at our core and how to leverage our strengths to improve outcomes in multiple areas of life. Research on character has led to the design of interventions to build hope and self-efficacy, and to foster goal achievement. This paper will review research on character strengths as a facilitator of employment for job seekers with disabilities and provide an outline for integrating character-based positive interventions into a national employment program for people with acquired physical disabilities.

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## Introduction

Americans with disabilities experience high rates of unemployment. In 2016, just 27.7% of people with disabilities, ages 18-64, were employed compared to 72.8% of people without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). National efforts to support individuals across the spectrum of disability to achieve competitive employment have not met with great success. In fact, the employment rate for people with disabilities has not increased in the past decade (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The employment status of people with disabilities is complicated by high rates of poverty and financial instability. In 2015, people with disabilities, ages 21-64, lived in poverty at a rate more than twice that of their non-disabled peers, 27% versus 11.6% (Erickson, Lee, & vonSchrader, 2017). Furthermore, individuals with a work limitation (such as a disability) are more likely to live in poverty the longer the work limitation persists. If the work limitation persists for more than 36 months, the individual is 14 times more likely to be poor (Strauser, 2014). Disability and poverty are cyclical, each perpetuating the other.

Individuals with disabilities, particularly those who are poor, face multiple external barriers to employment: 1) lower educational and skill attainment, 2) complex public benefit rules, 3) limited access to reliable transportation, 4) lack of work-related supports, such as assistive technology, and 5) persistent employer-bias (Ameri et al., 2015; Sevak, Houtenville, Brucker, & O'Neill, 2015). Additionally, individuals who are disabled and poor face internal conflicts during the process of seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment that create barriers to successful employment outcomes. These barriers include 1) diminished self-efficacy and hope – limiting one's belief that they can get a job, 2) social role devaluation – making

social interactions, such as interviews and onboarding more challenging; and 3) extrinsic work motivations – leading to job choices that lack meaning and engagement (Strauser, 2014).

Positive psychology -- the study, development, and application of positive psychological phenomena such as positive emotions, traits, institutions, relational functioning, and optimal functioning – offers new insight toward understanding human behavior and aligning positive psychology theories and interventions to foster behavior change. The scientific study and practice of character strengths is one especially robust and comprehensive domain of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths offer a framework for understanding who we are at our core and how to leverage our strengths to improve outcomes in multiple areas of one's life (Mayerson, 2015). Research on character has led to the design of interventions that put into motion the use of character strengths to build an individual's hope, self-efficacy, and other positive traits to achieve one's goals.

This paper will utilize research on character strengths to design a model for integrating character strengths into employment services for people with acquired physical disabilities, served by National Disability Institute's American Dream Employment Network (ADEN). ADEN is an Administrative Employment Network under the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program. ADEN provides a range of employment services to individuals, ages 18-64, who receive Social Security disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). It is important to understand that to receive SSA disability benefits, one must prove that one has a documented disability that will last twelve months or longer, or result in death, and one must prove that their documented medical condition prevents them from working at a substantial level. In 2017, a substantial level is \$1,170 per month in countable wages for a non-blind individual (Social Security Administration, 2017).

Through ADEN members, a majority of the extrinsic barriers to employment noted can be met through a layering of available services and supports. However, there is no systematic strategy for addressing the intrinsic barriers that job seekers with disabilities face. Partially because no single entity is responsible for ensuring the well-being of individuals with disabilities and partially because the disability community has not yet had the necessary level of exposure to positive psychology to have the language or tools to integrate positive psychology theories and interventions into disability services. After 18 years in disability services, and recent exposure to positive psychology, my goal for this paper is to demonstrate empirical evidence for the use of positive psychology strategies within disability employment services and provide a framework for a pilot project that will test interventions within a national disability employment program.

More specifically, based on empirical findings on character strengths and related positive interventions, the designed model, Character Strengths (CS) Works, will support job seekers with acquired physical disabilities in four ways outlined below. To highlight these ways, we will follow the actions and activities of Ana, a job seeker with an acquired physical disability who has been out of work for five years, and her vocational counselor Diana (names and identifying information have been changed to protect their identity).

- 1. Seeking employment - Build hope and self-efficacy through a deeper understanding of the 24 character strengths the job seeker possesses and can engage during the job search.**

*Ana has a spinal cord injury due to a car accident. She has not worked in five years.*

*Prior to her accident, Ana was a quality control technician for a factory that produced small parts for ten years. She no longer has the manual dexterity to complete the required tasks of her previous job. Ana has doubts that she can work again but she cannot survive*



*on her disability benefit alone. She is uncertain as to how to go about getting a job. She is afraid of what will happen to her disability benefits and the personal care attendant services she receives to live independently. Ana would benefit from understanding that she has 24 character strengths and employing her strengths in hope-building activities that help her to envision new ways she can do things. Ana would also benefit from interventions that build her self-efficacy so that she can navigate the path back to work.*

**2. Obtaining employment - Identify tangible strengths the job seeker brings to a new job along with language to share those strengths in an interview.**

*Ana feels insecure about her skills, how she will explain the gap in her resume, and what an employer will think about her when they see her. She believes she has something to offer the world but isn't sure how to convince others of that. Should she get a job, Ana wonders whether her co-workers will believe she can do the job. Ana has moments of doubt that others will see her and not her disability. Ana would benefit from an understanding and exploration of her signature strengths and how she has applied them to overcome barriers in the past. These signature strengths are hers to employ during the job search, during the interview, and on the job. Importantly, Ana will have language to explain to others (and to herself) the signature strengths she possesses and how they relate to her ability to set and complete goals, develop relationships with colleagues, and tackle challenges that come her way.*

**3. Maintaining employment – identifying which strengths the job seeker is likely to rely on once they are on the job and ways in which the job seeker with a disability and their workforce development professional can explore using character strengths in a balanced way.**

*Ana uses her understanding of her character strengths to recognize strengths she is employing in her new job and with her new colleagues. Ana realizes that sometimes she overuses or underuses a strength, which contributes to delays in completing tasks, missed opportunities to connect with her co-workers, and misunderstanding with her supervisor. Ana works with her ADEN member (workforce development professional) to discuss tasks, relationships, moments in time on the job, and how she can use her strengths in an optimal way to increase her self-efficacy and to improve her performance on the job.*

**4. Career development – exploring character roles in career development.**

*In this initial return to work, Ana is ready to take any job she is offered. As someone who receives a Social Security disability benefit, Ana may eventually be forced to make a decision between earning more money and keeping her disability benefits. To make this leap, Ana may want to explore a job with greater earning potential. Fortunately, Ana is experiencing success on the job. Her self-efficacy has increased. When Ana is ready to explore whether she will stay in this first job or move on to a job that leads to a career, Ana can explore her character strengths in relation to organizational roles as a component of her job assessment and career development.*

The CS-Works model, defined herein, will identify positive interventions to support the job seeker in building self-efficacy and hope through the use of character strengths; a strategic approach to training service providers on character strengths; a first look at measuring the impact of the designed interventions on employment outcomes; and opportunities to share the anticipated outcomes with the broader disability and positive psychology communities.

### **Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology was emanated in 1998 by Dr. Martin Seligman, while President of the American Psychological Association (APA). Seligman (1998) identified positive psychology as a new science and profession that “emphasizes the understanding and building of the most positive qualities of an individual: optimism, courage, work ethic, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, the capacity for pleasure and insight, and social responsibility” (p. 1). Positive psychology was developed, in part, to reorient the field of psychology from a field that heals mental illness to one that builds human betterment. He declared a mission “to utilize quality scientific research and scholarship” to “identify and understand the traits and underpinnings of preventive psychological health ...” (Seligman, 1998, p. 3).

Positive psychology is the study of human well-being and how to cultivate the best in each of us, as individuals and as a society. The positive psychology framework focuses on “three related topics: 1) positive subjective experiences (happiness, pleasure, gratification, fulfillment), 2) positive individual traits (strengths of character, talents, interests, and values), and 3) positive institutions (families, schools, businesses, communities, societies)” (Peterson, 2006, p. 46; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Since Seligman’s call to action, positive psychology has grown in scope and capacity, attracting researchers and practitioners from around the globe. As a result, there are multiple theories within positive psychology that address happiness, well-being, affect, meaning, relationships, mindfulness, self-determination, goal-setting, flow, achievement, motivation, and many other topics. And complementary positive interventions that equip individuals (professionals and laypeople) with action steps they can take to improve one or more aspects of their well-being. As this paper focuses on select theories and positive interventions that may

facilitate improved employment outcomes for people with acquired physical disabilities, I will review just a handful of relevant positive psychology theories.

Prior to the development of positive psychology as a field, there have been many psychologists, philosophers, and other social scientists who researched, theorized, and wrote about identifying, celebrating, and developing positive aspects of human traits and behaviors. Beginning with Aristotle who wrote about eudaimonia as “a character of persons that entails living in accordance with reason and moderation, and aiming toward excellence and the realization of a complete human life” (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008, p. 143). More simply put, eudaimonia is the pursuit of aligning one’s actions with one’s true self or virtues (Waterman, 1990). Aristotle identifies specific virtues one should possess, including generosity, courage, and practical wisdom. Aristotle viewed practical wisdom as the highest virtue. To have practical wisdom is to have the will (desire) and the way (know-how) to do the right thing at the right time in the right way (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006).

Melchert (2002) claims that Aristotle identified virtues as habits and that to develop these virtues, one must practice. Just as good habits can be developed, bad habits can be developed as well. Therefore, one must use their reason (consciousness) and practical wisdom to assess their emotions and behaviors and find the mean or balance or optimal use that will allow them to use it in an appropriate way. This practice becomes a virtuous cycle (Melchert, 2002) in which the action of employing reason to use the mean builds the virtue, which leads to more employment of the mean, which increases the ability to use the virtue, and round and round.

William James (1892/1984) points to the plasticity of the mind as our opportunity to form new habits. To do so, one must 1) make a conscious decision to change, 2) practice and not give up until the habit is established, and 3) take action each time an opportunity presents. Our

responses to internal and external stimuli are primarily based on the physical reaction of our body and the perception of our mind. Our body and mind create a cycle of intentions and actions that work together in a mind-body connection. When we are focused, we can monitor our mind-body connection to attain goals, increase well-being, and enhance our connection to the world around us. Because we do not always have complete control over both our mind and body, we need to create positive habits that will set into motion what we would do if we did have control. The power of creating a habit is that, in time, it will operate without the need for the conscious mind. Instead, subconscious sensations will initiate a chain of automated discharges that compel us to action (James, 1892/1984).

For low-income individuals, such as many people with disabilities, the function of the mind on autopilot is critically important because poverty reduces cognitive performance (Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). A growing body of research demonstrates that people in poverty have the constant presence of stress. High stress reduces one's ability to set goals, complete tasks, and solve problems (Sakamoto, Rarick, Woo, & Wang, 2014). This can lead to poor decision making, which can tear down an individual's self-efficacy and agency thinking. Given our negativity bias, the mind of an individual with an acquired physical disability on autopilot may focus on the things they are not able to do, the difficulties of their life, thoughts that things will never get better, and/or negative self-talk. Positive psychology strategies can fortify disability services to better address both the internal and external barriers that limit the employment and economic advancement of individuals across the spectrum of disability.

### **Positive Interventions**

Positive psychology researchers and practitioners design positive interventions to establish or improve one or more aspects of an individual's feelings, cognitions, actions, and/or

habits based on theoretical, experimental, or evaluative evidence. Traditional psychology has identified an array of approaches to address negative behaviors and emotions associated with anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Positive interventions are activities that will improve a person's well-being by increasing positive strengths, emotions, actions, and/or habits, and/or decreasing or supplementing negative strengths, emotions, actions, and/or habits. Positive interventions have a growing evidence base for increasing well-being and for decreasing depression as shown in one meta-analysis of 51 interventions with 4,266 individuals (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Positive interventions offer actions that result in bursts of positive emotions, thoughts and behaviors that can broaden thinking and attention. Once one's mindset is broadened, new actions, thoughts, and/or emotions lead to building positive attributes (social, physical, intellectual, and physical), as described in Fredrickson's (2009) Broaden and Build theory. When practiced over time, these new actions can become new positive habits, improving overall well-being. Positive interventions can -- and should -- be customized to address specific issues within specific populations. Positive interventions are often, but not always, developed to support the achievement of goals related to increased positive emotion and well-being.

### **Positive Interventions and Employment Services**

Liu, Wang, and Huang's (2014) meta-analysis of job search interventions found that including one of the following six components improves the effectiveness of the intervention: "teaching job search skills, improving self-presentation, boosting self-efficacy, encouraging proactivity, promoting goal setting, or enlisting social support" (p. 1026). Current employment services include activities to teach job search skills, improve self-presentation, and enlist social support. The CS-Works model will build upon empirical evidence to identify positive

interventions that address boosting self-efficacy, encouraging proactivity, and promoting goal setting. For example, interventions that increase hope help individuals who have incurred an injury find ways around the new barriers they face, including supporting individuals with spinal cord injuries in their return to work. (Snyder, Lehman, Kluck, & Monsson, 2006; Blake, Brooks, Greenbaum, & Chan, 2017). Character strengths interventions lead to improved goal progress and strengths-based career counseling has resulted in improved employment outcomes (Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010; Littman-Ovadia, Lazar-Butbul, & Benjamin, 2014). Moreover, I suggest that character strengths might serve as direct pathways to each of the six components identified in the Liu et al. (2014) meta-analysis as helpful to individuals in the job search process. Table 1 offers some hypothetical correlates and examples of these character strength links, some of which are addressed in the CS-Works model explained later.

<b>Type of job search skill</b>	<b>Character strengths to target</b>	<b>Example</b>
Teaching job search skills	Love of learning, curiosity	Use curiosity to explore new possibilities; to ask oneself questions; to be open to new possibilities.
Improving self-presentation	Prudence, self-regulation, self-kindness, judgment/critical thinking	Use critical thinking to examine the details of what is strong and what is less strong about one's self-presentation; while also deploying self-kindness along the way.
Boosting self-efficacy	Honesty, perseverance, bravery	Each step forward is a new success to celebrate; each obstacle overcome is another mark of perseverance; be true/authentic to who you are and self-confidence will grow.
Encouraging proactivity	Zest, creativity, curiosity; bravery	Being active and never settling for inertia is crucial; doing things in new ways (creativity) can help catalyze oneself to be courageous in moving forward.

Promoting goal-setting	Hope, prudence, perseverance	It takes hope to envision a goal; prudence to plan out the details; and perseverance to carry it through.
Enlisting social support	Teamwork, humility, social intelligence	Many people can be on “your team” to help you in the search; it may take some humility to realize all human beings need support.

The proposed model will include multiple positive interventions for job seekers with disabilities to use during the job search, in preparation of the interview, on the job, and during career exploration. For example, Ana, our job seeker with a disability, is meeting with her job counselor Diana to develop Ana’s employment plan. Ana demonstrates resistance to setting the sub-goals that will lead to her overarching goal of employment. Diana sets aside the employment plan to re-focus on Ana’s character strengths. Together they talk through how Ana can use her signature strengths of social intelligence and curiosity to set up informational interviews with five companies. Positive interventions that use character strengths have the flexibility of design to employ varied strengths to address the components Liu et al. (2014) note as well as challenges unique to the individual job seeker with a disability.

### **Positive Psychology and People with Disabilities**

The field of positive psychology has not yet fully integrated people with disabilities as a personal characteristic identified or measured in research. However, there are several positive psychology researchers and practitioners who have designed and tested theories and positive interventions with and for several subsets of the broader disability community. Their work has explored self-determination (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Buchanan, & Lopez, 2006), hope (Snyder et al., 2006), proactive coping (Phillips, Smedema, Fleming, Sung, & Allen, 2016), mindfulness (Singh et al., 2006), positive group psychotherapy (Tomasulo, 2014) and character strengths



(Niemiec, Shogren, & Wehmeyer, 2017), including the validation of the character strengths survey, the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Forber-Pratt, & Palmer, 2015).

### **State of research on barriers and facilitators to employment for people with disabilities**

#### **Barriers to Employment**

A 2017 survey of 400 Texans with disabilities and their supports identified the following major barriers to employment. The top cited reason was a tie between 1a) employers won't hire me, and 1b) I worry that I will lose Social Security cash benefits. Other major barriers included 2) lack of transportation, 3a) lack of education or training, 3b) unable to work (or work more) because of health or disability, 4) worry that I will lose Medicare or Medicaid Health Insurance, 5a) lack of reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and 5b) do not know where to go for help in finding work or getting a better job (Goodman, Jennings, & Ulisky, 2017). Other barriers people reported are as follows: 6) worry about increased health insurance premiums due to earnings, 7) my family or guardian worry that I will lose Medicare or Medicaid Health Insurance, 8) worry about increase to my monthly rental payments due to earnings. Sevak and Khan (2016) surveyed 2,418 people with disabilities (psychiatric and/or physical) receiving vocational rehabilitation services in Mississippi, New Jersey, and Ohio to assess barriers to employment. Barriers were identified and ranked in the following order: 1) health, 2) discouraged from previous attempts, 3) cannot find job, 4) lack of skills, 5) employers won't give me a chance, 6) lack of reliable transportation, 7) workplace not accessible, 8) do not want to lose SSDI/Medicaid. In both this small sample and additional larger samples, these common themes emerge: 1) documented health conditions/disabilities create challenges to working; 2) individuals are discouraged and perceive that employers do not want to hire them; 3) people fear

a loss of disability, healthcare, and other benefits; 4) access to reliable transportation is pervasive, and 5) misunderstandings about the availability of workplace accommodations.

As noted earlier, individuals who are disabled and poor face internal conflicts during the process of seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment that create barriers to successful employment outcomes: 1) diminished self-efficacy and hope – limiting one’s belief that they can get a job, 2) social role devaluation – making social interactions, such as interviews and onboarding, more challenging; and 3) extrinsic work motivations – leading to job choices that lack meaning and engagement (Strauser, 2014). Furthermore, “poverty, financial strain, and unemployment contribute to depression and anxiety, hopelessness, poor quality of life, low self-esteem, shame, and social isolation” (Jiménez-Solomon et al., 2016, p. 223). In addition to these challenges, acquiring a physical disability may be accompanied by other chronic health conditions, can require psychosocial adjustments, and often drastically shifts an individual’s goals and vision for their life. (Blake et al., 2017).

### **Facilitators of Employment**

Sevak and Khan (2016) also indexed facilitators of employment for people with psychiatric and physical disabilities. These were also noted as items received at current job: 1) flexible schedule, 2) job coach/training, 3) arranged assistance from co-workers, 4) modified job duties, 5) counseling/therapy, 6) help with transportation, 7) modified work space, 8) counseling on work benefits, 9) personal care assistance, and 10) help with child/family care. These facilitators to employment address several of the external barriers to employment but none of the internal barriers. In fact, the need for a job coach, arranged assistance from co-workers, and/or modified job duties can highlight the individual’s disability and, therefore, may amplify diminished self-efficacy and social role devaluation rather than addressing them.

Other research on facilitators of employment for people with disabilities point to approaches to vocational counseling and education. Vocational counseling strategies such as job matching, matching the individual's skills and abilities to the job resulted in higher employment outcomes than traditional career counseling (Choe & Baldwin, 2017). Individuals with disabilities who are college educated experience higher levels of employment and reduced lengths of employment after acquiring a disability (Ameri et al., 2015). Higher education degrees may signal to an employer that this candidate has qualifications, reducing the impact of disability. It is important to note that a wage gap persists between college educated workers with and without disabilities. Individuals with a Bachelor's degree earn, on average, \$12,719 less annually than their non-disabled colleagues. Those with a Master's degree or higher earn \$20,871 less annually than their peers without a disability (Yin, Shaewitz, & Megra, 2014).

A scan for research on facilitators to employment for people with disabilities that addresses the internal barriers individuals may face resulted in only a handful of articles. Blake, Brooks, Greenbaum, and Chan (2017) found that attachment (ability to connect with others) and hope were predictive of full-time employment for people with spinal cord injuries. Tansey, Iwanaga, Bezyak, and Ditchman (2017) found self-determined work motivation to be a useful model in vocational rehabilitation. And Kronström et al. (2011) found that low optimism acts a predictor of work disability and high optimism/low pessimism facilitate a return to work. Other research has focused on the intersect of positive psychology theories, disability, rehabilitation, health outcomes, and life satisfaction. Vocation is not as frequently addressed as rehabilitation. The crossover of rehabilitation psychology and positive psychology (Dunn, Uswatte, Elliott, Lastres, & Beard, 2013) was not explored for this paper.

### **Character Strengths, Hope, and Self-Efficacy**

## Character Strengths

Character strengths are “capacities humans have for thinking, feeling, and behaving. Specifically, they are the psychological ingredients for displaying virtues or human goodness” (VIA Institute on Character, 2017a). In other words, they are part of who we are at our core and how we respond to everyday life. Character strengths were classified through a collaborative effort by 55 social scientists who, led by Christopher Peterson on a three-year project, identified and classified 24 character strengths under six overarching virtues -- wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Each of the 24 character strengths is categorized within one of the overarching virtues. Table 2 represents the VIA Classification of Character Strengths which includes each of the 24 character strengths and an abbreviated definition under the overarching virtue (VIA Institute on Character, 2004-2017a).

Virtue	Character Strength
<b>Wisdom and Knowledge:</b> Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge	<b>Creativity</b> [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it
	<b>Curiosity</b> [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering
	<b>Judgment</b> [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one’s mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly
	<b>Love of Learning:</b>

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	<p>Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one’s own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows</p>
<p><b>Courage:</b> Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal</p>	<p><b>Perspective</b> [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people</p> <p><b>Bravery</b> [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it</p> <p><b>Perseverance</b> [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks</p> <p><b>Honesty</b> [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions</p> <p><b>Zest</b> [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated</p>
<p><b>Humanity:</b> Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others</p>	<p><b>Love:</b> Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people</p> <p><b>Kindness</b> [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them</p> <p><b>Social Intelligence</b> [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick</p>
<p><b>Justice:</b> Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</p>	<p><b>Teamwork</b> [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share</p> <p><b>Fairness:</b> Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.</p>

	<b>Leadership:</b> Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.
<b>Temperance:</b> Strengths that protect against excess	<b>Forgiveness:</b> Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
	<b>Humility:</b> Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
	<b>Prudence:</b> Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
	<b>Self-Regulation</b> [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions
<b>Transcendence:</b> Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning	<b>Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence</b> [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
	<b>Gratitude:</b> Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
	<b>Hope</b> [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
	<b>Humor</b> [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
	<b>Spirituality</b> [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

Character strengths have been studied and determined to be valid across cultures and across time. Understanding, exploring, and using one's character strengths can lead to multiple positive outcomes: 1) Better self-knowledge, 2) improved self-efficacy, 3) increased happiness, 4) decreased depression, and 5) better goal attainment, to name a few. Understanding character

strengths can also help one understand, celebrate, and support others by identifying and fostering their strengths (strength-spotting and strengths appreciation) (Niemiec, 2013).

Signature strengths are the character strengths an individual uses most frequently, celebrates and/or “owns,” naturally uses without much thought, views with authenticity (“this is the real me”), experiences an ease and desire to use in new ways, and feels energized when employing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 18). While there is no set number of signature strengths for all individuals, the most recent research suggests individuals have approximately five core strengths. Research conventions most commonly have subjects take the VIA-IS Survey for adults or youth (VIA Institute, 2017b) and identify their top five strengths. Identifying a signature strength to employ during an exercise or positive intervention increases the positive impact. Additionally, researchers have found that using signature strengths in a new way increases happiness and decreases depression for six months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013).

## **Hope**

Hope is an individual’s perceived ability to set a goal, identify the strategies to achieve that goal (pathways thinking/mind), and implement those strategies (agencies thinking/action) Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015; Snyder et al., 2006). Snyder et al. (2006) suggest that individuals receiving rehabilitation benefit from positive interventions for hope. Hope is a change agent, motivating an individual to take action, even if they do not yet have the necessary level of self-efficacy to ensure success. Hope is inherent but not level across individuals. “Higher hope has correlated previously with superior physical and mental functioning” (Snyder et al., 2006, p. 89).

We can assess individual levels of hope using the validated State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996; see the State Hope Scale in Appendix A). The State Hope Scale measures an

individual's level of hope during a moment in time and connected to an event, such as a job search. An individual's dispositional hope is a broader view of their level of hope in general. While dispositional hope can be measured, state hope is more related to the situation/challenge at hand and related goal-directed thinking. Assessing an individual's level of hope supports the identification of deficits in one's perception that they have the ability to identify strategies and/or take action to achieve that goal.

Increasing hope in individuals is beneficial, as those with high levels of hope see obstacles to goals as challenges to be overcome (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Hope building strategies focus on current goals and highlight past success and future opportunities as opposed to failures. Most importantly, hope theory focuses on the individual's perception of what they can do and helps the individual to focus on solutions rather than barriers. For job seekers with disabilities who have had to prove that they are unable to work, hope supports the individual's perception that they can, even when they have not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate proof.

### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy, "what I believe I can do with my skills under certain conditions," (Maddux, 2009, p. 3) is paramount to achieving one's full potential. Self-efficacy impacts five areas of an individual's well-being: 1) Psychological well-being -- influencing our sense of control over our behavior, environment, and thoughts and feelings; 2) physical health -- choice of healthy versus unhealthy behaviors, immune system support, susceptibility to infections, progression of disease and management of stress and pain (Maddux, 2009); 3) psychotherapy -- building the skills and sense of efficacy for problem-solving; 4) collective efficacy -- ability to recognize others' capabilities and to work together to achieve common goals; and 5) self-regulation -- influencing the goals we set, persistence towards those goals, and the ability to remain "task-diagnostic"



(focused on problem-solving) as opposed to “self-diagnostic” (focused on personal inadequacies) when problems arise. Self-efficacy affirms that confidence, effort, and persistence are more potent than innate ability (Maddux, 2009).

Self-efficacy can relate both to an individual’s general feelings about their abilities as well as to a specific task or, more specifically, their career (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005; O’Brien, 2003). We can assess multiple aspects of self-efficacy through a variety of self-efficacy scales. The use of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; see the General Self-Efficacy Scale in Appendix B) allows for the assessment of an individual’s general level of self-efficacy, “a broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations” (Luszczynska et al., 2005, p. 81). Considering the range of barriers to work identified earlier, job seekers with disabilities would benefit from confidence that they can cope with challenges as they arise, across multiple areas of their life.

### **Character strengths and employment**

Character strengths research has included the application of character strengths within several facets of employment. Although the majority of research has not assessed individuals with disabilities, we will review several findings with the consideration that job seekers with disabilities are job seekers first. Reflecting on the social model of disability, people with disabilities are more aptly characterized as people with physical ailments that are made disabling based on interactions with physical and social environments, including the attitudes of other people and the policies and practices of systems (Shakespeare, 2013). Therefore, with relative confidence, we can assume that the presence of a physical disability does not discount findings that would apply to job seekers without physical disabilities. As noted earlier, acquiring a

disability and living in poverty have profound effects on individual's lives, including the stability of their environment, their views of their own capabilities, and the ways they are viewed by others. Aligning character strengths with hope and self-efficacy may ameliorate some of these challenges and act as facilitators to obtaining and maintaining employment.

During the job search, the use of character strengths as a component of strengths-based career counseling led to increased employment rates (80%) compared to traditional career counseling (60%) (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2014). During a job interview, character strengths offer language to explain who we are at our core and why that matters in getting the job done. Kauffman (2010) suggests that job seekers create a one-minute narrative that uses character strengths to describe themselves in an interview. For example, an applicant for a receptionist position who ranks high in kindness can share with a potential employer that they “believe that others are worthy of attention and affirmation for their own sake as human beings, not out of a sense of duty or principle,” exemplifying their desire to treat others well (VIA Institute on Character, 2004-2017a).

Understanding the strengths one relies on can also help in acclimating to a new job and workplace culture. If I know that I rank high in prudence, I may explore how I will use that prudence to make thoughtful decisions, but not allow it to be an impediment to action. De Botton and Armstrong (2013) may offer an explanation for this as they outline seven psychological frailties humans experience, including “We feel isolated and persecuted; we lose sight of our best side; and we do not know ourselves” (pp. 57-58). At the core of each of these frailties is a misunderstanding of ourselves, others, and our shared human experience. Because character strengths help us to better understand multiple aspects of our personality and behavior, and the characteristics of others, they provide the connection of who I am and what I do to who you are

and what you do. They highlight the ways in which we are all the same, which can help to build positive relationships. Understanding character strengths can help one understand, celebrate, and support others by identifying and fostering their strengths (strength spotting).

Character strengths can also facilitate job satisfaction. Harzer and Ruch (2015) found greater correlation between strengths and work satisfaction when signature strengths (four or more) were used. Signature strengths are those character strengths an individual most frequently uses, celebrates, and/or “owns” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 18). Research suggests that the use of character strengths may improve several areas of well-being at work because the individual is able to leverage who they are at their core, which increases engagement (Crabb, 2011).

Through the identification of character strengths, the individual has a clear purpose for exploring how they see themselves, a framework for identifying strengths in others, and a language to share their best qualities with others, along with examples of those strengths in action. Through the CS-Works model, we will learn more about the potential benefits of integrating character strengths into disability employment services. I hypothesize that being more aware of one’s strengths, exploring ways to use one’s strengths and signature strengths, strengths-spotting, and positive interventions designed to leverage character strengths to increase hope, self-efficacy will improve individual efforts to secure employment, performance in job interviews, connecting to peers on the job, and maintaining the job. But is this enough?

### **Character Strengths and Team Roles**

As noted earlier, individuals with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than their non-disabled peers, and being unemployed for more than 36 months makes the individual 14 times more likely to be poor. Financial need often pushes individuals with

disabilities to seek out survival jobs; jobs that may be below the job seeker’s skill level, out of field, and/or low-paying. Survival jobs are typically meant to be temporary while a job seeker continues their job search. Individuals with disabilities are more likely to work part-time, to be paid hourly, and to have less desirable shifts (night, rotating, on-call) than their non-disabled peers, and are more likely to report that their schedule does not fit their needs (Galinsky, Goodman, Kim, & Bond, 2017). Yet, employees with disabilities are just as likely as those without to report that they plan to stay in their current job. People with disabilities may stay in survivor jobs due to a multitude of reasons, including the barriers to employment we discussed earlier.

Character strengths-defined roles may offer new insights to individuals with acquired disabilities about the way they use their character strengths in a range of team roles. Ruch, Gander, Platt, and Hofmann (2016) studied seven team roles identified by the VIA Institute on Character that align an individual’s character strengths with the tasks they complete as part of their job. Table 3 identifies each of the seven team roles and characteristics of people whose character strengths align with each role (VIA Institute on Character, 2004-2017b).

Table 3: <b>Team Roles</b> <sup>2</sup>	
<b>Role</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Idea Creators (IC)</b>	<b>Idea Creators (IC)</b> enjoy generating ideas to solve problems and facilitate growth. They innovate, reframe, renew, revolutionize. Whether dealing with simple daily issues or big strategic challenges, the “idea creators” are essential to the future of any business.
<b>Information Gatherers (IG)</b>	<b>Information Gatherers (IG)</b> enjoy learning about best practices, new market trends, vendors, competitors, market forces, and

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	finance. They like sharing what they learn in writing or presentations.
<b>Decision Makers (DM)</b>	<b>Decision Makers (DM)</b> are energized by analyzing information from various perspectives, weighing evidence, applying logic, and choosing a fruitful course of action.
<b>Implementers (IM)</b>	<b>Implementers (IM)</b> execute decisions. They are the “doers,” the ones who manufacture, market, sell, and deliver. Those who get things done are the backbone of every organization.
<b>Influencers (IN)</b>	<b>Influencers (IN)</b> are full of hope and enthusiasm, relishing the challenge of convincing others. They are essential to weather opposition and rejection as they continuously work to persuade customers, bankers, investors, and shareholders that the enterprise has value.
<b>Energizers (EN)</b>	<b>Energizers (EN)</b> are naturally dynamic. They’re like power plants, humming briskly through obstacles, rarely burning out, quarter to quarter and year to year. They infect others with the energy and enthusiasm to persevere.
<b>Relationship Managers (RM)</b>	<b>Relationship Managers (RM)</b> are especially well suited to build networks of people, resolve conflicts, and motivate and encourage people. They are good listeners with caring hearts, sympathetic ears, and practical advice. Such relationship-managers are essential to any business.

An individual’s roles are ranked based on an algorithm developed by Ruch et al. (2016) that takes into account an individual’s score on each of the 24 character strengths. An Employee Role Matching report is offered by the VIA Institute on Character to support individuals and teams in better understanding how to align their strengths for optimal performance and job satisfaction.

For individuals with an acquired physical disability, Employee Role Matching offers additional insight that may support an individual in thinking beyond their current survival job to a position that better aligns their strengths with their tasks. For example, Ana (who we met earlier) has accepted a job where she uses her quality assurance skills to review insurance claims part-time from home. Through her Employee Role Matching Report, Ana learns that her top two roles are Relationship Manager and Energizer. In a relationship manager role, Ana may

use her kindness, social intelligence, and fairness strengths to bring people together and to help resolve conflicts within a group (Ruch et al, 2016). As an Energizer, Ana may use her persistence, gratitude, kindness, social intelligence, and love strengths to keep a team energized, particularly when the team is overworked. In Ana's current role, she has very little interaction with others. In fact, she spends most of her time putting together information for claims in an Information Gatherer role, her lowest ranked role. Ana decides to explore other positions within the company that would allow her to spend more time on relationship managing and energizing. This is Ana's first step towards employment based on Ana's intrinsic motivation to use her strengths, rather than financial need.

### **Program design and implementation plan**

The following outlines a design for integrating character strengths into employment services for people with acquired physical disabilities, served by National Disability Institute's American Dream Employment Network (ADEN). ADEN is an Administrative Employment Network under the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program. The Ticket to Work program was enacted in 1999 to recruit, support, and pay qualified employment providers to meet the needs of eligible SSA disability beneficiaries seeking to obtain and maintain employment and to decrease their dependence on Social Security disability benefits (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011). Throughout the United States, there are approximately 13 million individuals ages 18-64 who receive a Social Security disability benefit and are eligible Ticket holders (Social Security Administration, 2016).

ADEN operates as an Administrative EN, operating as the EN of record to allow other employment services providers to serve Ticket holders under the ADEN umbrella without the administrative burden of the program. ADEN works with 50 members (employment services

providers) and more than 400 Ticket holders. These numbers are expected to double in the next two years. Ticket holders contact ADEN and are connected to members that serve their local area and/or are experienced in meeting the individuals' identified needs. ADEN members provide a range of employment services, customized to meet the needs of the Ticket holder. ADEN members are workforce professionals who have demonstrated success in meeting the employment needs of job seekers with disabilities. Importantly, ADEN members understand that they are successful only if the Ticket holder is supported to obtain and maintain employment at a level that will decrease their need for their SSA disability benefits.

ADEN offers four important features for Ticket holders; 1) exemplary customer service – Ticket holders are seen as critical to the success of the program; 2) benefits planning – Ticket holders receive the guidance they need to make an informed decisions about decreasing and/or losing their disability benefits; and 3) financial well-being – Ticket holders are educated about financial capability strategies and opportunities to improve their financial picture; and 4) ongoing support – Ticket holders receive ongoing support and guidance after they secure employment to ensure they maintain the job and to allow for career development.

ADEN has met with initial success. Forty-two percent (42%) of ADEN Ticket holders are employed. The average hourly wage is \$14.63 per hour and the average workweek is 30.5 hours. Nine percent (9%) of ADEN Ticket holders are in long-term non-pay status; no longer receiving SSA cash benefits due to work. SSA's national review of Ticket to Work program outcomes identified a low 2% of Ticket holders returned to work at a level that would result in just one month of non-pay status.

Currently, ADEN addresses several of the external barriers to employment people with disabilities face (i.e., complex public benefit rules and lack of work-related supports) and,

arguably, none of the internal barriers to employment (diminished self-efficacy and hope, social role devaluation, and extrinsic work motivations). While the program has demonstrated initial success, one criticism of the Ticket to Work program is that ENs have the option to serve only the Ticket holders they believe they can help, which results in their choosing the easiest to serve Ticket holders (Morton, 2013). Ongoing success of ADEN will require that current ADEN Ticket holders continue to obtain and maintain employment, and, as the program grows, harder to serve Ticket holders are engaged and served successfully. Integrating the use of character strengths into ADEN Ticket to Work services will focus on four key moments in time: 1) during the job search (seeking employment), 2) during the job interview (obtaining employment), 3) during the first 90 days (maintaining employment), and 4) during career exploration.

### **CS-Works Model**

The CS-Works model will use a train-the-trainer approach to build the capacity of ABLE members to support ABLE Ticket holders in utilizing character strengths-based positive interventions to achieve their employment goals. The training will focus on Niemiec's (2009) Aware, Explore, Apply approach to understanding and using character strengths. During the aware phase, foundational information about character strengths is provided to help the individual become more aware of what character strengths are, the definitions, as well as their particular character strengths. During the explore phase, the ADEN member will help the individual to think more fully about their top five character strengths, and how the individual previously used and currently uses their character strengths. The explore phase expands the individual's understanding of themselves, how the world sees them, and how they can use their strengths in the right way at the right time. During the apply phase, individuals receive tools to



apply their growing knowledge about their character strengths in ways that will help them to achieve their goals, specifically their work goals (Niemic, 2009).

ADEN members will be guided to offer CS-Works to each of their Ticket holders. Just as ADEN members opt in to CS-Works, Ticket holders will have the same option. To more fully integrate CS-Works into the ADEN project, all Ticket holders will receive a link to complete the VIA-IS Survey for Adults (VIA Institute, 2017b), the State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) at the time of their Ticket assignment to ADEN. Ticket holders who choose not to participate will receive the standard employment services available through the ADEN project.

The CS-Works train-the-trainer begins with training for the ADEN member. ADEN members are workforce professionals and may also be called service providers. ADEN members will learn about the train-the-trainer program through an email announcement and ADEN's weekly roundup, a virtual meeting for all members to share programmatic updates and upcoming trainings. The CS-Works train-the-trainer will be provided to ADEN members at no charge. ADEN members will opt in to the training as an added-value benefit of ADEN membership. The curriculum will be provided virtually to cohorts of at least five members at a time. All materials and training platforms will be fully accessible to ensure that ADEN members with disabilities can fully participate.

The CS-Works Train-the-Trainer Curriculum is designed to be taught to ADEN members who will then use of each of the modules to work with their ADEN Ticket holders. The CS-Works Train-the-Trainer Curriculum will include the following modules:

<b>Table 4: CS-Works Train-the-Trainer Curriculum</b>	
<b>Module 1 (AWARE):</b>	The VIA-IS Survey

<b>Overview:</b>	This module will provide an overview of the VIA Classification and VIA-IS Survey, including its purpose, history, and validity across time and cultures. This module will also introduce ADEN members to the VIA Institute's (2015) <a href="#">Supplement for Use When Supporting Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to Complete the VIA-Youth</a> , to foster the inclusion of job seekers with cognitive disabilities.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	Take the free <a href="#">VIA-IS Survey</a> as a first step to becoming more aware of your character strengths. Review your results. Write down or discuss with a friend/colleague your thoughts as you view your rank-ordered results. Is the ranking in the order you expected? Are there strengths with which you most align? Are there strengths you don't typically recognize in yourself? How do you feel now that you know that you have 24 strengths to use in all aspects of your life?
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Take the free <a href="#">VIA-IS Survey</a> as a first step to becoming more aware of your character strengths. Review your results. Write down or discuss with your service provider your thoughts as you view your rank-ordered results. Is the ranking in the order you expected? Are there strengths with which you most align? Are there strengths you don't typically recognize in yourself? How do you feel now that you know that you have 24 strengths to use in all aspects of your life?
<b>Module 2 (EXPLORE):</b>	Character Strengths
<b>Overview:</b>	This module explores the 24 character strengths, offering definitions of each strength. A tour of the <a href="#">VIA Institute website</a> is completed to orient ADEN members to ways character strengths can be used to set and achieve goals, improve emotional well-being, and shift one's perspective. The use of character strengths during select aspects of employment planning and employment services are identified.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	ADEN members identify one new way they will use one or more character strengths for one week and report back to the cohort.
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Ticket holders identify one challenge they are experiencing in their job search and determine one way they can use one or more of their character strengths in a new way to overcome this challenge.
<b>Module 3 (EXPLORE):</b>	Signature Strengths
<b>Overview:</b>	This module reviews signature strengths, the benefits of using signature strengths, and the overuse and underuse

	of strengths. Case scenarios of using signature strengths at their mean during key parts of the employment process will be explored.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	Create an elevator pitch about yourself that talks about several of your signature strengths and how you use them in your current job or how you could use them in a job that you would like to have.
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Create an elevator pitch for your next interview that tells the interviewer about several of your signature strengths and how they help to qualify you for the job, relate to the job and/or how you will use them on the job.
<b>Module 4 (EXPLORE):</b>	Strengths spotting
<b>Overview:</b>	This module will use what has been learned about character strengths and signature strengths to discuss strengths spotting, identifying strengths in another person. The use of strengths spotting to celebrate and connect with others will be explored.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	To prepare for your next meeting with a Ticket holder, identify a few of their strengths. Consider how they currently use these strengths and/or how their strengths could be used to achieve their employment plan.
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Identify a person in your life that you interact with regularly. Identify a few of their strengths. How do they use their strengths? Are these strengths that you share? How do you use these strengths in your own life? Share your findings with your service provider.
<b>Module 5 (APPLY):</b>	Hope
<b>Overview:</b>	This module will discuss hope as a tool that can improve an individual's ability to set goals for themselves and to take action to achieve those goals. ADEN members (only) will review the State Hope Scale, including how to read their Ticket holder's score. Two strategies for hope building – positive self-talk and evaluating progress toward goals – will be aligned with character strengths in support of employment goals.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	Helping people to identify progress toward their goals builds hope (Snyder, et al., 2006). Identify a Ticket holder you are currently working with and review their employment plan. Make a list of milestones that demonstrate progress toward the goals listed in the plan. For example, identifying three job opportunities is a milestone towards a goal to submit three applications in a given week. How will you use one or more of your character strengths to celebrate the Ticket holder achieving this milestone?

<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Complete the following activity every day for two weeks. Identify three things that went well today and write them down. Why did this happen? Did you use one or more of your character strengths to make this happen?
<b>Module 6 (APPLY):</b>	Self-efficacy
<b>Overview:</b>	This module will discuss self-efficacy and the impact of self-efficacy on individual achievement. ADEN members (only) will review the General Self-efficacy Scale, including how to read their Ticket holder's score and why using character strengths to build the individual's self-efficacy will support employment goals.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	Write about or share with a colleague a time when you successfully overcame a challenge in your current position. The challenge may reflect having to learn a new task, design a solution to a problem, or overcome an interpersonal conflict. 1) What were the circumstances? 2) Which of your strengths did you use? 3) Are there other skills you used? 4) How did you feel when you overcame the challenge?
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	Write about or share with your service provider a time when you successfully overcame a challenge at work (or in another setting). The challenge may reflect having to learn a new task, design a solution to a problem, or overcome an interpersonal conflict. 1) What were the circumstances? 2) Which of your strengths did you use? 3) Are there other skills you used? 4) How did you feel when you overcame the challenge? 5) How would you handle that challenge today?
<b>Module 7 (AWARE):</b>	Team roles
<b>Overview:</b>	This module will discuss team roles and the benefit of aligning one's character strengths use with their team role. Team roles offers two opportunities for ADEN members and ticket holders: 1) exploring the use of strengths in current roles on a team, and 2) exploring the alignment of strengths and roles for a better job match.
<b>Member Activity<sup>3</sup>:</b>	Review the results of your Role Matching Report. Consider how you can more fully deploy your signature strengths to maximize each specific role. For example, how might you offer unique contributions on your team through one or both of these roles? Discuss with your

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	supervisor or manager about any adjustment to your work that would allow you to maximize your use of these two roles. At a minimum, as you work with your team, whenever possible and appropriate, try to focus your energy on your highest two roles.
<b>Ticket holder Activity<sup>4</sup>:</b>	Review the results of your Role Matching Report. Discuss with your Service Provider ways in which your current job allows you to play the two strongest roles identified. Consider how you can more fully deploy your signature strengths to maximize each specific role. For example, how might you offer unique contributions on your team through one or both of these roles? If you are not currently able to perform these roles on the job, is it the right time to discuss with your supervisor or manager about adjustments to your work that would allow you to maximize your use of these two roles. If that is not possible, is there another job that would allow you to perform these roles on a team? Is not the right time to consider a different position or another step towards or within your career? At a minimum, as you work on a team, whenever possible and appropriate, try to focus your energy on your highest two roles.
<b>Module 8:</b>	Coaching your Ticket holder
<b>Overview:</b>	This module will give ADEN members tips on coaching Ticket holders through the CS-Works modules. Connections to a range of VIA Institute exercises and other uses of character strengths will be provided through an employment services lens.
<b>Member Activity:</b>	Explore the CS-Works Tools designed to support Ticket holders. Many tools are self-directed to complement employment planning and employment services.
<b>Ticket holder Activity:</b>	There is no Ticket holder activity for this module.

### Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the CS-Works model will be measured using both qualitative and quantitative tools. ADEN tracks Ticket holders, their goals, progress toward their goals,

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from R. M. Niemiec: Character Strengths Interventions. © 2018 Hogrefe Publishing and VIA Institute on Character

employment data, and select characteristics using a secure platform that only ADEN members and NDI ADEN staff can access. The Social Security Administration requires that all ADEN members and NDI ADEN staff pass a Federal background check, ensuring the secure treatment of the data and any personally identifiable information (PII) contained within the database. Adjustments to the database will be made to allow for storage of the Ticket holder's character strengths report and employee role matching report, tracking of measures for hope and self-efficacy, and case notes on the provision of positive interventions.

Projected outcomes include the following: 1) increases in hope and self-efficacy based on the State Hope Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale, 2) reduction in the number of days from program start date to employment, 3) increase in time on the job, and 4) increase in wages over five years. It is important to note that the SSA's Ticket to Work program has two intended outcomes: 1) Ticket holders secure work, and 2) Ticket holders reduce their monthly cash benefit to zero.

Tracking activities through the ADEN platform will allow us to compare outcomes between ADEN members and Ticket holders who opt-in to CS-Works and those who do not. We estimate that 30% of ADEN members will choose to participate in the pilot and will work with their Ticket holders to complete the range of CS-Works activities. To further inform our findings, NDI will seek out case studies on the use of the CS-Works model across geographic areas, ethnicities, and co-occurring disabilities. In addition, post-training assessments will provide an understanding of the effectiveness of the CS-Works training materials created for both ADEN members and for Ticket holders.

## **Conclusion**

Research on character is a growing body of work that continues to offer new and deeper insights into the role that character strengths can play in better understanding who we are at our core, setting and achieving a broad range of personal goals, and increasing well-being. CS-Works will be the first program of its kind to integrate character strengths within a national disability employment program toward improved employment outcomes. Furthermore, this is the first identified approach to using character strengths systematically in the employment process of people with disabilities; seeking employment, obtaining employment, maintaining employment, and continued career development. Outcomes and findings from this work will catalyze additional ideas and opportunities, areas for improvement, aspects of the program to replicate, and strategies for expanding the model to other sectors of the disability community (e.g., job seekers with intellectual and development disabilities, job seekers with mental health diagnoses, job seekers with traumatic brain injuries).

Developed with a deep commitment to designing and delivering services to improve the employment and economic advancement outcomes of people with disabilities, and a forthright acknowledgement that current employment strategies are not enough, CS-Works will leverage empirical evidence on positive psychology theories to bring new life to disability employment services. Unlike traditional disability services, the positive interventions designed for CS-Works will positively impact both the job seeker with a disability and the service provider. They will also address the often ignored intrinsic barriers that job seekers with disabilities face. This is new territory for disability service providers. This is new territory for National Disability Institute. But, much like Seligman's (1998) call to action to the field of psychology, it's time for disability employment services providers to explore the unprecedented promise that positive psychology holds for individuals with disabilities and for us all.

**Suggestions for future research**

The disability employment system would benefit from exploring other ways character strengths can be leveraged to overcome barriers to employment. For example, Shandra and Hogan (2008) found that college graduates have 1.85 greater odds of securing employment and earn 22% more than their less educated peers. Future research could design and test positive interventions that use character strengths as facilitators to completing college. Liu et al. (2014) found that social supports are a facilitator of employment. Future research could explore ways individuals with disabilities can use strengths-spotting to increase their connections to others, expanding their social networks. Research within positive organizational scholarship, which focuses on what is going well within organizations, could be reviewed to identify evidence-based strategies for creating work environments that value diversity and create welcoming environments for employees with disabilities.

To build a broader body of research on positive psychology theories and people with disabilities, future positive psychology research could track disability status as one of the participant demographic characteristics. Worldwide, disability researchers have agreed upon six questions that are used to determine if research participants are individuals with disabilities. The six questions from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) are as follows:

1. Are you deaf or do you have serious difficulty hearing?
2. Are you blind or do you have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?
3. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
4. Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
5. Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?



6. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

A seventh question captures individuals who may not have a functional limitation but self-identify as a person with a disability: Do you identify yourself as a person with a disability? Capturing disability data would allow researchers to assess whether disability creates an interaction with independent variables.

Much like race or socioeconomic status, disability plays a role in multiple aspects of a person's life. Tracking disability status in future research would provide new information to assess whether disability status creates an interaction effect. Tracking disability status could also inform any potential need to modify or create supplements for positive interventions to accommodate segments of the disability population. One such example is the VIA-IS for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities (Shogren et al., 2015).

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## Appendix A

## The State Hope Scale

When administering the State Hope Scale, it is labeled as the “Goals Scale for the Present.”

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes how you think about yourself right now and put that number in the blank before each sentence. Please take a few moments to focus on yourself and what is going on in your life at this moment. Once you have this “here and now” mindset, go ahead and answer each item according to the following scale:

1. Definitely false
2. Mostly false
3. Somewhat false
4. Slightly false
5. Slightly true
6. Somewhat true
7. Mostly true
8. Definitely true

Questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my goals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Right now, I see myself as being pretty successful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I can think of many ways to reach my current goals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. At this time, I am meeting the goals that I have set for myself.

Scoring: The Agency subscale score is derived by summing the three even-numbered items; the Pathways subscale score is derived by adding the three odd-numbered items. The total State Hope Scale score is derived by summing the three Agency and the three Pathways items. Scores can range from a low of 6 to a high of 48.

*Note.* From Snyder, C. R., Sympson, S. C., Ybasco, F. C., Borders, T. F., Babyak, M. A., & Higgins, R. L. (1996). Development and validation of the State Hope Scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 335.

## Appendix B

## General Self-Efficacy Scale

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes how you think about yourself and put that number in the blank before each sentence. Please take a few moments to focus on your life overall and answer each item according to the following scale:

1. Not at all true
2. Hardly true
3. Moderately true
4. Exactly true

## Questions:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

Scoring: Sum up the responses to all 10 items to yield the final composite score with a range from 10 to 40. While a score of 10 would demonstrate lower self-efficacy, this language is not used with the individual.

*Note.* From Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized self-efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.